

## The Creation of the Universe and Human Beings

In the beginning an egg contained the entire universe. Within the egg was one chaotic mass. Heaven and earth were identical, and all was eternally dark, for neither the sun nor the moon existed. From within this dark mass Pangu, the first being, was formed. Finding himself alive in darkness, encased within an egg, and surrounded by chaos, Pangu decided to bring order into the universe.

First he broke open the world egg. The lighter part (*yang*) rose and became the heavens, while the heavier part (*yin*) sank and became the earth. Pangu tried to stand upon the earth, but the heavens pressed heavily upon his head. He realized that no life would ever be able to exist on earth if the heavens were not high in the sky, so he sat down and thought about how to solve this problem. Finally, Pangu decided that the only way living objects and creatures would form and survive upon the earth would be if he held up the sky.

For the next 18,000 years, Pangu worked constantly to keep the heavens from crushing the surface of the earth. He ate only the mists that blew into his mouth. He never slept. At first he could only rest on his knees with his elbows bent, as, summoning all of his great strength, he pushed his hands upward against the sky. Then the time came when he could rise to his feet with his elbows bent as he pushed his hands upward against the sky. At last Pangu could stand at his full height and stretch his arms upward to their full length as he pushed his hands upward against the sky.

Day after day and night after night, month after month and year after year, Pangu stood as firmly as a rock column and continuously pushed the heavens upward with his hands. Little by little, the sky rose higher and higher above the earth, moving an additional ten feet each day. The higher the heavens rose, the taller Pangu became.

Finally the heavens rested high above the earth, and Pangu realized that he was very, very tired. He looked up at the sky above his hands and then he looked far, far down to the earth beneath his feet. He felt certain that the distance between heaven and earth was so great that he could lie down and rest without fearing that the sky would collapse and crush the earth.

So Pangu lay down and fell asleep. He died in his sleep, and his body gave shape and substance to the universe.



Pangu's head formed the mountain of the East while his feet formed the mountain of the West. His torso formed the mountain of the Center, his left arm the mountain of the South, and his right arm the mountain of the North. These five sacred mountains defined the four corners of the square earth and its center. Each stood firmly upon the earth like a giant stone column and did its part to hold up the heavens.

The hair on Pangu's head and his eyebrows formed the planets and the stars. His left eye formed the sun and his right eye the moon. His flesh formed the soil of the earth and his blood the oceans and rivers. His teeth and his bones formed rocks, minerals, and gems. His breath formed the clouds and the wind, while his voice became lightning and thunder. His perspiration formed rain and the dew. The hair on his body formed trees, plants, and flowers, while parasites living on his skin became animals and fish.

The Mother Goddess Nugua created the first people. She herself was formed like a human being, except that instead of legs she had the tail of a dragon. Nugua glided over the earth, admiring the beautiful forms that had emerged from Pangu's body. She loved the trees, plants, and flowers, but she was particularly fascinated by the animals and fish, for they were more active, living creatures. After studying them for a while, however, Nugua decided that creation was not yet complete. Animals and fish simply were not intelligent enough to satisfy her. She would create creatures that would be superior to all other living things.



As Nugua glided along the Yellow River, she decided to use the substance of the riverbed to form human beings. Sitting down along the shore of the river, she took handfuls of wet clay from the riverbed and formed them into little people. She made them look almost like her, except that instead of dragon tails, she gave them two legs to match their two arms. Once they were prepared to walk, Nugua breathed life into them. Some she impregnated with *yang*, the masculine, aggressive principle in nature, and they became men. Others she impregnated with *yin*, the female, submissive principle in nature, and they became women.



After a while, Nugua became tired of fashioning people one at a time, so she thought of a faster way. She placed a rope in the wet clay of the riverbed and rolled it around until the upper end of it was completely covered. Then she picked up the rope and shook it over the shore. Each drop of mud that fell off became a human being. The two methods did not create exactly the same kind of people, however. The ones Nugua had made by hand were richer and more intelligent than those who had fallen in drops from her rope.

Some time thereafter, when all of Nugua's children had built homes and had settled into villages and farms in order to provide for their daily needs, the monster Gong-gong became very angry. He rammed his head into one of the mountains that supported the sky. The mountain came tumbling to the ground, tearing a great hole in the part of the heavens it had supported and causing the earth to crack open in many places. Flames blazed from some of the crevasses, burning homes and crops. Rivers overflowed their banks and torrents of underground water gushed from other fissures, flooding the land and creating a vast ocean where once there had been villages and farms.

The Great Goddess watched in horror as hundreds of human beings starved to death or drowned. She knew that she had to act quickly if she hoped to save any of the children she had created. First she set fire to the reeds that grew beside the river and stuffed their ashes into the burning cracks in the earth to smother the flames. Then she forced the floods to seep into the earth and to flow in controlled river channels by piling up more of the reed ashes as dikes.

Once human beings could return to their farms and villages and resume their daily occupations, Nugua glided over to the Yellow River and chose a number of stones in five different colors. She melted them in a forge and covered the hole in the heavens with them. Then she removed the four legs from a giant tortoise and used one at each corner of the earth as an additional pillar to support the sky. In this way, the Mother Goddess repaired the devastation the Gong-gong had so thoughtlessly created.

But Nugua knew of no way to raise the northeast corner of the earth on which the fifth pillar had fallen. To this day, that land is lower than the rest of China, and rivers flow eastward across that low land into the sea.